

# Report

# Canyon de Chelly National Monument

## ■ 1.0 Site Description

Canyon de Chelly National Monument is located in northeastern Arizona, approximately three miles from the town of Chinle. The Park is located in the middle of the Navajo Nation. The Park is accessible through Chinle via U.S. Highway 191 to the west. With permission of the Navajo Nation, the Park may also be accessed via N-7 (Navajo Route 7), a dirt road that runs northwest to southeast towards Window Rock.

Canyon de Chelly is a National Monument managed by the NPS. It is an 83,840-acre (131-square-mile) site comprised of high mesas and deep narrow canyons. The key physical characteristics of the Park related to transportation are:

- The only access without special permission is via a two-lane road off of U.S. Highway 191 in Chinle.
- The monument is Y-shaped and it is approximately 30 to 40 miles from one end of the north canyon rim to the opposite end of the south canyon rim.
- Much of the monument is accessible only by foot, horseback, or four-wheel-drive vehicles with high clearance. With the exception of one trail, a Navajo authorized guide is required.
- The need to protect valuable archaeological and cultural resources, as well as the private property of the resident Navajos, makes increasing visitor access by expansion or improvement of transportation infrastructure undesirable.

Using road counts as the measuring device, the annual visitation is estimated at 850,000 people per year. Peak visitation occurs during the months of May through September. The monument staff reports that the typical visitor spends two to four hours at the monument. Canyon de Chelly is not a destination Park. Most visitors see the Park en route to another destination. Most visitors arrive at the Park between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m.

The top five transportation issues or problems as identified by site staff are:

1. Trespassing by visitors on private (Navajo) roads, via auto and/or mountain bikes.
2. Lack of public transportation to/from Canyon de Chelly National Monument. Tour bus companies such as TNM&O/Greyhound do not serve Chinle.
3. Overcrowding of the parking area at White House Overlook and Trail.

4. Older campground facilities which do not accommodate modern (larger) recreational vehicles very well.
5. Thefts from parked autos at overlooks.

Several additional transportation problems/issues are present at the Park. First is the general remoteness of the monument. The second issue relates to the relationship between the National Monument and the Navajo Nation.

## ■ 2.0 Existing ATS

Existing Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) are limited. A concessionaire and one other company provide four-wheel-drive tours of Canyon de Chelly. White Dove is the concessionaire that operates out of the Thunderbird Lodge. They provide half-day tours at \$35 per person or full-day tours at \$55 per person. They use 1952 military passenger transports. All of these vehicles have been converted to run on propane. Most of the vehicles are open-air, although a few have “greenhouse” covers that are used in cold weather during the winter. De Chelly is the private tour provider. Together White Dove and De Chelly tours serve 32,000 visitors per year or three percent to five percent of all visitors.

No information was available regarding the operating costs of the concession-provided tours.

## ■ 3.0 ATS Needs

There is limited need for an ATS to provide either access to/from Canyon de Chelly or within it. The number of visitors, type of activities, dispersed activity levels, and remote location are not conducive to ATS.

Over time, Canyon de Chelly and its concessionaire might consider upgrading the vehicles used for the existing tours. Newer vehicles could offer more visitor amenities and visitor interpretation. Newer vehicles, however would not be likely to impact the overall transportation patterns much.

## ■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

Due to its remote location, dispersed visitation, and its elongated site geography, Canyon de Chelly appears to have minimal potential for introduction of ATS. Although there is some occasional crowding at one parking area within the Park, there appears little that a bus or other technology transportation system could do to alleviate the infrequent parking pressures.

## ■ 5.0 Bibliography

Canyon de Chelly National Monument. Internet site: <http://www.recreation.gov/detail.cfm?ID=646>. Information printed October 27, 1999.

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Canyon de Chelly National Monument, Arizona. “Canyon de Chelly Official Map and Guide.” GPO: 1998-432-903/60316.

Machlis, Gary E. “Report Summary.” *Visitor Services Project: Canyon de Chelly National Monument*. University of Idaho Cooperative Park Studies Unit. 1993.

## ■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Anna Marie Fender, Superintendent. Telephone Interview. November 5, 1999

Anna Marie Fender, Superintendent. Telephone Interview. November 8, 1999